Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance Mission Statement:

To serve the Commonwealth's most vulnerable families and individuals with dignity and respect, ensuring those eligible for our services have access to those services in an accurate, timely, and culturally sensitive manner, and in a way that promotes clients' independence and long-term self-sufficiency.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE

SHORE,

a Massachusetts HMIS

DTA/Housing & Homeless

Services Unit

600 Washington Street

Phone: 617-348-5603

Fax: 617-348-5585

Email:

HMIS@dta.state.ma.us

INTRODUCING OUR NEW LOGO & TAGLINE

In an effort to enhance DTA's outreach efforts and partnerships with our clients, providers and other external partners, DTA is proud to announce the use of our new logo and tagline, "Believing you can". As you will see, these items blend elements of the mission and characteristics of our agency to create a powerful symbol of DTA as an agency that can assist our clients reach a higher level of self-sufficiency.

We believe that the use of the logo and tagline will allow us to further stress our message of partnership we undertake with each and every one of our

Believing you can.

FOOD ASSISTANCE · JOB ASSISTANCE · CASH ASSISTANCE · EMERGENCY SHELTER

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE dta

clients to move them closer to self-sufficiency and be more recognizable to the community. Over the upcoming months, you will start to see the new logo and tagline incorporated on all materials released by the agency including our letterhead, posters and brochures.

SHORE VERSION 6.3 NOW IN DEVELOPMENT

UPDATE

Version 6.3 of SHORE was released early in February. A considerable amount of time and energy has been expended on making sure our application is in compliance with American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations.

The following enhancements/ fixes are expected to be

released in this new build:

- Auto-exit of family members if the Head of Household is checked out;

- Delete program entry/ exit records of family members if the Head of Household's entry/exit program record is deleted.

- When completing program information, "No financial resources" was not being saved. This has been corrected.

- The view of a newly created service will now refresh so you will not have to go back into Lookup to see if the service was correctly added.

- When updating a service, clicking Save will now return you to the Add Service page instead of bringing you back to the Client Information page.

- When logging out, the browser window will now close out instead of bringing you to a blank page.

- Custom fields – will now support "mandatory" option for both Radio Button and Check Box items.

- Custom fields – Number type was required to be mandatory. It has been changed to support "optional" as well.

FAQS ON THE DATA UPLOAD PROCESS

Who is an "uploader"?

DTA funded agencies that choose to not use SHORE for their HMIS application or non-DTA funded agencies that desire to participate in the statewide data collection effort.

What data do we send?

Agencies have the option of sending their complete data set each time or sending just information that has changed or been added since the last upload. DTA is only looking for data related to services provided to homeless individuals and families at this time but may later open the doors to include information on non-homeless services such as prevention.

How do we upload our data?

OK, get ready for some acronyms. Data needs to be in either the *HUD eXtensible Markup Language (XML)* format, available from www.HMIS.info, or in the *DTA SHORE Automated Program Interface (API)* format which is comprised of four comma separated variable (CSV) tables. Data is to be sent using the *Secure File and Exchange Delivery (SFED)* system. If you have questions on the process please email Matt@SimtechSolutions.com and I will get back to you ASAP. That would be ten acronyms if you count "OK".

When are we expected to send our data?

Going forward DTA will be expecting data to be sent on a quarterly basis. In order to spread out the work of collecting, reviewing and loading the data each continuum will be assigned a reporting cycle. Data will be due to DTA within 30 days of the end date of the quarterly reporting cycle assigned. Please contact your CoC technical administrator if you do not know what end dates have been assigned to your continuum.

What happens after we submit our data?

DTA has built a reporting system that will be used to review the data for both accuracy and completeness. It is the expectation that these reports will be reviewed by each agency and the invalid data is corrected prior to the next upload. If the data quality is sub par the agency will be informed that they need to clean and resend their data or they will not meet their reporting obligations.

Who is currently participating in the upload process?

DTA has received data from five different commercialized HMIS software applications and several custom Access databases. This includes data for 8 continuums and 31 agencies with another 31 agencies that are in process.

Who at our agency is responsible for data quality?

Each agency is expected to appoint a staff person(s) to take ownership of the data quality process. This staff member will serve as the point person for DTA for the purposes of facilitating the resolution of any issues that may need to be addressed with the data. By gathering quality data from each agency we will be able to better understand and address the issues surrounding homelessness. With that goal in mind, we thank you in advance for your attention to this concerted effort.

What's in it for us?

In the short term, your organization's data is already informing public policy on both a Continuum of Care and statewide basis through the use of the SHORE data warehouse. In the long term, it is our intention to make this data warehouse publicly accessible through a web interface so that policy analysts, researchers, students and advocates alike can have access to this critical aggregate information.
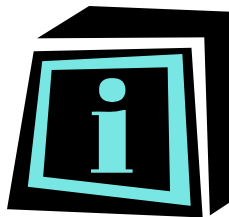
SHORE USER TRAINING

We would like to remind all of the organizations using the SHORE system that training continues to be available for any new staff that you hire after your initial deployment. We are also happy to provide refresher training for anyone who might benefit. To register for training, please contact Gail Law at 617-348-5631 or gail.law@state.ma.us

ADMINISTRATOR/REPORTING TRAINING TO BEGIN!

We are pleased to report that our training session for Provider Administrators has been finalized. This training will consist of two distinct segments. The morning session will review use of the 'canned' reports and getting the most of these reports by using Excel to manipulate the data. The afternoon session will be more complex and will cover moving your data into Access and query building. These sessions are designed to allow for the maximum usage of *your* HMIS system. DTA's ultimate goal in its HMIS effort is not only to allow you to report to us in the more efficient electronic format so we can make effective policy decisions but to use the data yourself to inform program decisions. We would like at least one staff member from each organization that utilizes the SHORE system to attend all or part of this training. This should be the person who could make the most use out of reporting and is able to work with provider staff to improve data quality.

The training has been scheduled for Wednesday, March 21, 2007 from 9am—4pm at 600 Washington St., 2nd floor.

For more information or to register for Administrator/Reporting Training please contact Gail Law at 617-348-5631 or gail.law@state.ma.us

HMIS ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING

This training was designed with two goals in mind; (1) to raise the level of data quality in SHORE and (2) to provide instruction in how to use the information from SHORE to assist Administrators with other agency reports and databases they have to create and maintain. To accomplish these goals, the course will teach Administrators **Excel** and **Access** basics for data management.

The first part of the course will start with a discussion about quality control. The job of an administrator of SHORE is first and foremost to reduce the duplication of homeless individual records in the system. This is directly related to the data quality and quantity entered by your staff. The more information, the less duplication!

The discussion will include:

- A review of how to generate reports and downloads.
- Explanation of Data Quality report
- Areas of improvement in client's basic file
- Using the Data Quality report to find gaps in information
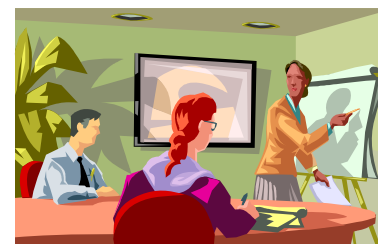
The next part of the class was created to assist you, the Administrator, with managing the information and reports you deal with on a day-to-day basis.

The discussion will include:

- A dialogue about other agency reports
- Explanation of how to use the reports from SHORE as a foundation for other agency reports

The majority of the training will be focused on using Excel and Access to accomplish these goals. The **Excel** basic training consists of the following:

- Spreadsheet structure, navigation basics, editing text, formatting
- Sort, filter, subtotals, import/export
- Cut, paste, and consolidation across worksheets
- Linking worksheets
- Security of information

The afternoon will be customized for the intermediate and advanced students. This is when the class will start **Access** training.

- Generating the right query by asking the right question
- Tables, queries
- Importing into Excel
- Database security

A LETTER FROM DTA TO ALL MASSACHUSETTS CONTINUA OF CARE

DTA staff have recently become aware that specious – if not deliberately misleading – information about HMIS/SHORE has been circulated via email by Mr. John LaBella of HousingWorks, Inc. In the past, DTA has chosen not to dignify Mr. LaBella's comments; however, his latest missive is so egregious that DTA felt a response was merited. Assistant Commissioner Edward Sanders-Bey therefore sent a letter to all Massachusetts CoCs to address issues raised by Mr. LaBella's email. That letter, sent January 10, 2007, is reproduced below.

To Whom It May Concern:

As one of the Commonwealth's largest providers of funding for services to homeless people, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) endeavors to keep providers and advocates across the Commonwealth up to date on the latest developments in the world of Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) and DTA's own HMIS, the Statewide Housing Operations and Research Environment (SHORE). We have become aware that specious – if not deliberately misleading – information has been circulated to homeless services providers and advocates. In keeping with the SHORE project's core value of free and open communication, we would like to provide you with the facts.

SHORE is DTA's approach to HMIS. It is a system that DTA invested in to meet its own HUD reporting requirements, which were created at the behest of Congress. The system's core elements are therefore the very same elements described in the Notice from HUD in the Federal Register (Vol. 69, No. 146: July 30, 2004). Fourteen of these elements, called the "universal data elements," are required by HUD of all programs that receive HUD funding. There are also a number of "program-specific" data elements. For non-shelter programs that receive HUD funding, the program-specific elements "are optional but recommended since they allow local CoCs to obtain consistent information across a range of providers that can be used to plan service delivery, monitor the provision of services, and identify client outcomes" (p. 45913). As the convenor of the Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC), DTA must require contractors for HUD-funded programs to collect all the data elements, as specified in the Register, as well as report to HUD on the progress being made in its own HMIS implementation.

Realizing the enormous potential value in gathering the best, most accurate, and most comprehensive aggregate data, DTA has asked all of its providers to contribute data to SHORE. In addition, SHORE is available free of charge to any homeless services provider – whether or not they contract with DTA. Also, in recognition of the fact that many providers are already invested in their own HMIS software, DTA has made it possible to upload data to SHORE via a secure file transfer system. By making contribution of data to SHORE easy (yet also extremely secure), it is hoped that a central data storage repository will exist in order for advocates, providers (both DTA-funded and non-DTA-funded), researchers, and policymakers to have access to aggregate, accurate data on the homeless population in Massachusetts.

Accurate data collection, through SHORE in particular, has the support of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), as well as many homeless services providers and advocates throughout the state. Furthermore, in FY 2007, the state legislature granted DTA a budgetary line-item in the amount of $1 million specifically designated for maintenance and development of SHORE, and it is expected that this funding will be renewed or increased in FY 2008, as the legislature sees mandated quarterly reports from DTA. Indeed, in granting the line-item, the legislature ensured that no program funding would be used for the maintenance and enhancement of SHORE.

Although SHORE is sponsored by EOHHS, its development has included significant participation from potential end-users since its inception. Hundreds of hours of joint architectural design ("JAD") sessions and user acceptance tests with providers and the software development team helped ensure maximum user-friendliness. The SHORE Steering Committee continues this user participation. Members of the Steering Committee include consumers, providers, and advocates – many of whom do not receive any funding from the state and some of whom do not contribute data to SHORE in any way. By keeping membership open to all of the Commonwealth's homeless services providers, regardless of the HMIS software they use (if any at all), DTA hopes to make SHORE the most accessible HMIS available, as well as to meet the goal of statewide unduplicated data.

For those who are unacquainted with SHORE, questions of privacy and data accessibility may linger. Statewide outreach efforts to inform and reassure providers continue to be made through the SHORE Steering Committee and its Protection of Sensitive Data and Data Sharing subcommittees, and it cannot be stated often enough just how much control and security SHORE offers providers and their clients. Although both HUD and DTA require organizations to provide certain data elements to the best of their ability, we recognize that it is not always possible or desirable. Not all clients are willing to share personal information with providers, and providers may be hesitant to collect it; both HUD and DTA recognize this fact and have made it clear through regulations and

A LETTER FROM DTA TO ALL MASSACHUSETTS CONTINUA OF CARE, CONTINUED

contracts that no-one who is in need may be denied services for refusing to provide information to an HMIS, including SHORE. Ironically, many providers have found that clients who clearly understand the aims of HMIS are more than happy to cooperate.

Data sharing and accessibility is also a common issue for providers. Many must report their data to their local CoC or to funding sources other than DTA and HUD. SHORE makes this possible through its download feature, by which an authorized user at the provider level can remotely request and receive a file in MS Excel or Comma-Separated-Value format. This means that any user with the proper security level can access his or her agency's data at any time, free of charge, with a few clicks of the mouse and import this data into other applications, such as Excel or Access, for analysis. At this time, DTA does not have any legal agreements to make client-level data available to CoC convenors. The reason for this is simple: client privacy. To assure the highest level of confidentiality for clients, DTA's legal agreement with each provider states that DTA will not, under any circumstances, reveal client-level data to anyone other than that provider. The data remain the property of the provider, and are therefore stored on servers external to DTA. However, CoCs who need to aggregate data from their membership can also create legal agreements among all providers to share data. After reviewing these to ensure that clients' privacy rights are safeguarded, DTA can send aggregated data to a CoC designee. Finally, providers who contract with DTA are only required to provide data to the SHORE database, and they may meet this obligation through a secure transfer of an industry-standard-format file. In short, DTA has left it up to each individual provider to determine what software best fits its reporting needs and contractual obligations, retaining for the provider the highest level of control over how it records and chooses to share (or not to share) its data.

Finally, we recognize that providers may be concerned that data entered into SHORE may be used to justify cuts in funding; however, we can assure you that this is not the case. In fact, since having an HMIS is a HUD requirement, millions of dollars are at stake if providers fail to utilize an HMIS – be it SHORE or another software system. Further, in addition to the budgetary line-item for HMIS, the state legislature increasingly expects accurate, verifiable reporting to justify its spending; therefore, it is expected that reliable aggregate data on the services rendered to homeless persons will result in more funding where it is needed most. In short, participation in SHORE and the SHORE Steering Committee – as a user, an uploader, or an advocate – lends each provider's reports the credibility of a system that has the support of both the state and federal government – something that no other HMIS provider can offer.

DTA's Mission is to serve the Commonwealth's most vulnerable families and individuals with dignity and respect in a way that promotes clients' independence and long-term self-sufficiency. We believe that through statewide participation in SHORE, whether it be via web interface or data upload, providers and policymakers alike will have the tools necessary to provide efficient, effective services to homeless families in Massachusetts. HMIS is a nationwide effort, and DTA is proud to serve the Commonwealth and the country through SHORE.

If you should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email or call Debra Connolly, SHORE/ HMIS Manager, at debra.connolly@state.ma.us or 617-348-5624. We also encourage you to attend a Steering Committee meeting. The next meeting will be held Wednesday, April 11, 2007, from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, at:

<div align="center">

The China Trade Building

1st floor Conference Room

2 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02111

</div>

The China Trade Building is a short walk from the MBTA Orange and Silver Lines' Chinatown Station and the Green Line Boylston Street Station.

As always, thank you for your efforts / concerns on behalf of homeless families and individuals in Massachusetts.

Sincerely yours,

Edward Sanders-Bey

Edward Sanders-Bey

Assistant Commissioner for Policy and Program Management

CONTINUUM OF CARE/ESG CORNER

National CoC Homeless Data 2005 and Massachusetts CoC Homeless Data 2006

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) has published the nationally aggregated CoC Homeless Census data. The report explains that the data is a compilation of the CoC counts submitted to HUD for January 2005 and may not be completely accurate. Some of the national report's highlights are listed below. We annotated each section with the aggregated Massachusetts CoC Point in Time (PIT) Homeless Census counts compiled by the MICHH Data Task Force from January '06. We do not have aggregate data for Massachusetts for 2005.

- The NAEH report estimated that 744,313 people nationwide experienced homelessness, presumably at a Point in Time in January '05. The Massachusetts "HUD-defined Homeless" PIT Count listed for that time is 14,730

  * **The Massachusetts January '06 CoC counts compiled by the MICHH from the same HUD-defined group represented 13,733 homeless people;**

- The NAEH report also states that in January '05 56% of homeless people counted nationwide were living in shelters and transitional housing, while 44% were unsheltered

  * **The Massachusetts January '06 CoC counts show 89% of homeless people were sheltered and 11% were unsheltered;**

- Nationally, in January '05, 59% of homeless people counted were single adults and 41% were persons living in families.

  * **The Massachusetts January '06 CoC counts show 57% of homeless people counted were single adults and 43% were persons living in families;**

- In January '05, 98,452 homeless families were counted nationwide

  * **The Massachusetts January '06 CoC counts show 2,019 homeless families were counted at a PIT in January '06; and,**

- The NAEH report states 23% of homeless people nationwide were reported as chronically homeless

  * **The Massachusetts January '06 CoC counts show 19% of homeless people were chronically homeless.**

CoC Maps and Information
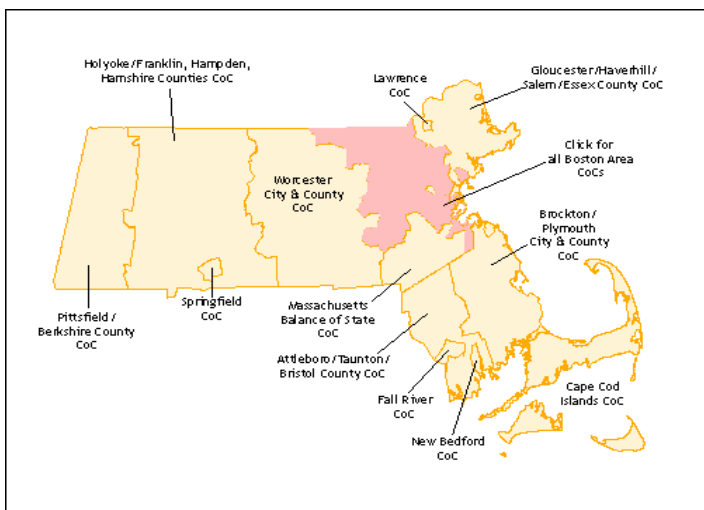
The CoC Maps will be available shortly on the HMIS info website. When you click on your CoC, your housing inventory will be produced. Keep an eye on this site!
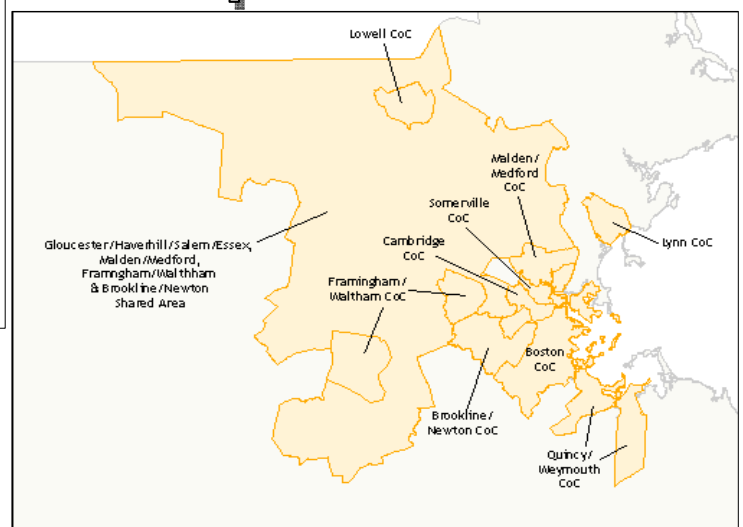
HMIS STEERING COMMITTEE DATES & INFORMATION

SHORE Steering Committee Schedule for 2007:

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Wednesday, July 18, 2007

Wednesday, October 24, 2007

All SHORE Steering Committee Meetings are held from 2:00 – 4:00 pm at the China Trade Building, 2 Boylston Street, Boston.

Take the Orange Line to Chinatown or the Green Line to Boylston Street.

For more information contact Deb Connolly at 617-348-5624 or debra.connolly@state.ma.us.

NEW FEATURE COMING NEXT ISSUE

In our next issue we will begin a "Spotlight" feature. Volunteers who are willing to share their experiences, struggles and successes both with SHORE and with meeting HUD HMIS requirements are asked to contact Deb Connolly at debra.connolly@state.ma.us or 617-348-5624.

CONTINUUM OF CARE/ESG CORNER, CONTINUED

ESG Training

HOLD THE DATE!

We have been working with HUD and TAC Inc. to schedule an ESG training for all service providers that have state-awarded ESG contracts. The training will be held on **February 28, 2007** in **Marlborough** at the **Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel.**

ESG state contract holders will receive more information shortly!

Delay in HUD Award Announcements

The Balance of State CoC alone has 97 individuals and 7 families whose housing won't be paid with the expected federal dollars as of February 1. In March, another 68 families will not have HUD rent dollars to pay their rental costs. Our CoC has less formerly homeless people at risk than some other CoCs. Please let us know if you expect any of your formerly homeless families to lose their housing as a result of the delay. We will work with you ahead of time to transition people to other programs, where possible.

PIT Homeless Census

Once you have had a chance to compile your CoC's Point in Time Homeless Census Data, please e-mail all of your completed counts to Elaine.Frawley@state.ma.us. Please send us whatever counts you have collected. For example, if you collected data on families that HUD refers to as "Precariously Housed", but not homeless, please send that data in as well, labeling them as "Precariously Housed" so that we can aggregate the data uniformly.

We would like to have the counts before the end of February so that we can aggregate the data and get the initial results back to you. If you your data will not be compiled by February 28, please notify us as soon as possible.

Next Statewide CoC Meeting

We are past due for a meeting. Since there are a number of things to discuss, this meeting will be an informal brainstorm session. Among other CoC-related concerns, we will be addressing Discharge Planning issues and deciding if we want to send comments about the proposed federal legislation impacting the Continua individually or as a group.

We should think about some of the other issues we'd like to have addressed, so that we can invite a representative from Washington to the follow-up meeting, which is tentatively scheduled for March 5, 2007 in Holyoke.

Please forward suggestions to Elaine.Frawley@state.ma.us or call Elaine at 617-348-5936.

Updates: FY'07 CoC Application

- The General Section is accessible at **http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/ grants/fundsavail.cfm.**
- If you didn't get the e-mail with a draft FY'07 CoC Application and Exhibit 2 (with an analysis of the changes), and want to receive it, contact Elaine.Frawley@state.ma.us for an electronic copy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

Legal Briefings & Training:
Gail Law
617-348-5631
Gail.Law@state.ma.us

Operations & Conversion:
Bill Silvestri
617-348-5161
William.Silvestri@state.ma.us

SHORE SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **On January 11, 2007 the 100th organization was issued user IDs for SHORE**

- **Over 644 individuals have been trained to use SHORE**